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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a study conducted with 100 parents of high school-age students in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to determine the nature and range of their goals for secondary education. Each parent participated in an open-ended, tape-recorded interview. Results of these interviews, while qualitative, revealed basic sex-role expectations of parents for their children. Some parents, primarily middle- to upper-class Anglo, directed their comments specifically toward expanding the limits of traditional sex roles, and while no parent mentioned that girls might choose to remain single, many mentioned that boys might choose to remain bachelors. Most parents commenting on sex roles were basically conservative and assumed girls would be wives and mothers first and professional workers second. Parents also ranked the 12 general outcomes (purposes of education) and the 47 Mediate Goals (manner in which education is accomplished) derived from the interviews. The pattern of priorities indicated that women were more concerned with the day-to-day operation of the school system, stressing discipline, obedience, evaluation of teachers and administrators, and personal development. Men emphasized basic skills, working with others, vocational guidance and training, physical fitness, and equal opportunity. (Author/PFS)

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# ROLE EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Introduction

In 1973, Humanic Designs of New Jersey and the Behavioral Research Division of the University of New Mexico undertook a study, funded by the National Institute of Education, to (1) devise a methodology to permit persons who were not accustomed to talking about what they want from public schools to do so fully in ways that educational policymakers can understand and (2) use the methodology to obtain substantive data about the preferences of parents of high school children and compare groups of parents and parents with professionals. Thus the major objective was to determine the range of parents' concerns, the hierarchy of these concerns, and the priorities among these goals.

## Methods

The methodology involved a modified Delphi technique in which 100 Albuquerque parents of high school-aged students were selected by multi-stage cluster sampling which ensured an equal probability sample. A series of

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in-depth, personal Elicitation Interviews were conducted which produced 297 statements after redundancies were eliminated. These statements were further reduced to 48 Mediate Goals, the manner in which education is accomplished, and 12 general outcomes, the purposes of education as usually stated by educators. The 12 general outcomes and the 48 Mediate Goals are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1

Parents' Priority Rank of General Outcomes

| Rank | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Providing general academic knowledge. |
| 2 | Providing vocation-specific knowledge. |
| 3 | Providing for personal and social adjustment and maturity. |
| 4 | Providing knowledge of moral responsibility. |
| 5 | Providing knowledge specific to college preparation. |
| 6 | Providing knowledge specific to informed citizenship. |
| 7 | Providing knowledge specific to adult family responsibilities. |
| 8 | Providing for knowledge for the care and well-being of one's body. |
| 9 | Providing aesthetic, humanistic, and cultural appreciation. |
| 10 | Providing knowledge of the need to conform to society's rules and regulations. |
| 11 | Providing knowledge specific to the adult consumer role. |
| 12 | Providing services and facilities for the parents and other members of the community. |

Table 2

Parental Ranking of Mediate Goals

| Rank | |
|---|---|
| 1 | When they graduate, students should have the basic skills of reading, writing, spelling, and speaking. |
| 2 | Students should understand the need for education, have a desire to learn, and know how to think and reason. |
| 3 | Students should have basic skills in practical arithmetic. |
| 4 | Discipline standards for students should be set up and strictly enforced. |
| 5 | The continued education and a periodic evaluation of teachers should be required. |
| 6 | Students should have a basic education in courses such as science, history, government, geography, and foreign language. |
| 7 | College preparation should be provided so that students may gain skills necessary for successful college work. |
| 8 | Students should be kept motivated and interested in school. |
| 9 | Students should develop a feeling of self-worth and self-understanding. |
| 10 | Students should acquire the knowledge which will enable them to be good, responsible, and informed citizens. |
| 11 | Students should develop good character -- a sense of moral, ethical, and religious values and goals. |
| 12 | Teachers should have personal characteristics that enable them to communicate with their students and to teach more effectively. |
| 13 | Higher academic standards should be set up and enforced. |
| 14 | Students should learn to obey the rules and regulations of society. |
| 15 | Vocational guidance should be provided so that students can learn about their own abilities and interests. |
| 16 | Higher standards should be established and enforced for the selection of school administrators and teachers. |
| 17 | Vocational training should be provided so that students may gain skills for employment immediately after graduation. |
| 18 | Classes should be set up so that students can learn effectively -- ample space, the necessary equipment, and fewer students per teacher. |
| 19 | Special programs should be provided for students who have a learning handicap -- either physical or emotional. |

Table 2 (cont'd)

| Rank | |
|---|---|
| 20 | All students, regardless of ethnic, cultural, or religious group, should have an equal opportunity to participate in any course or activity offered by the school -- for example, home economics, industrial arts, secretarial courses, competitive sports, clubs, and organizations. |
| 21 | Students should learn to get along with and work with others. |
| 22 | Students should learn to handle the everyday problems of adult life -- for example, budgets, property, credit, interest, taxes. |
| 23 | Students should learn to take pride in their work. |
| 24 | Students should understand and respect people of all cultures. |
| 25 | Students should learn about and develop an ability to adjust to the changing world and its problems. |
| 26 | Where their children are concerned, parents should be actively involved with teachers and administrators. |
| 27 | Schools should set up specific and regular forms of communication with parents. |
| 28 | Schools should provide for the physical health and safety of their students. |
| 29 | Both boys and girls should have an equal opportunity to participate in any course or activity offered by the school -- for example, home economics, industrial arts, secretarial courses, competitive athletics, and organizations. |
| 30 | Students should have a basic knowledge of the human relationships of adult life -- being a spouse, a parent, or a single adult. |
| 31 | Students should learn to value each and every job. |
| 32 | Students should understand the importance of physical fitness in adult life. |
| 33 | Schools should provide for the mental health of their students. |
| 34 | Students should be required to go to school all day, Monday through Friday. |
| 35 | Students should have an appreciation of the arts, culture, and beauty in the world. |
| 36 | The entire community (parents, taxpayers, as well as school personnel and the school board) should be involved with the school. |

Table 2 (cont'd)

| Rank | |
|---|---|
| 37 | Students should be helped to get a job or to enroll in a college after finishing high school. |
| 38 | The school environment should be pleasant and attractive. |
| 39 | Students should learn to be wise buyers and users of goods and services. |
| 40 | Schools should have adequate athletic facilities. |
| 41 | Complete physical fitness programs should be offered for all students. |
| 42 | Adequate food services should be available. |
| 43 | Adequate medical services should be available. |
| 44 | Services for the adults in the community -- such as classes, consumer education, training in family life, sports activities, and specific help in such areas as coping with drugs, should be provided. |
| 45 | Competitive sports programs should be offered. |
| 46 | Students should develop talents, interests, and hobbies for the leisure time activities of their adult lives. |
| 47 | School facilities -- buildings, library, sports facilities -- should be open to the community. |
| 48 | The school year should be extended to a 12-month program with staggered vacations for teachers and students. |

There were several phases involved in this research. Copies of the final reports are available. Here, I am only going to discuss the results relating to sex-role expectations of parents for their children. These expectations became evident in both the Elicitation Interviews and the ranking procedures for the Mediate Goals and outcomes.

Results: Qualitative

Results of the Elicitation Interviews are qualitative. Statements were not considered more or less important because of the number of parents who said the same thing. The major question asked parents to describe the ideal high school; questions following dealt specifically with teachers, courses,

facilities, etc. There were no questions specifically dealing with classes boys or girls should or should not take. Most questions were oriented to "your child/children," and the school the respondent's child attended. For instance, "Let's talk about (name) High School and what it's doing right now;" or "Let's talk about what you'd like your children to be able to do when they finish high school." Although many, in the course of their interviews, stated express ideas about women's roles, most parents did not specifically discuss sex-role expectations; those who did said only a few sentences and were as likely to have sons as they were to have daughters. The most common type of statement dealt with "all" students, no sex mentioned. For instance, "Students should be taught about government and politics so they'll understand the system and how to vote." Some parents, however, particularly middle- and upper-class Anglos, did direct their comments toward expanding traditional sex-roles. Some of these parents mentioned that traditional roles for women should be expanded. More often, though, a specific course or career possibility was discussed. For instance:

> I'd like to see a course in women's history or the role of women 'cause I think it's important for girls to grow up understanding that they're not limited to being housewives and nurses and teachers.
>
> Teaching women how to be women . . . the same sort of thing we teach in racial heritage courses. . . . Courses which recognize what the women's role is, what the women's role can be.
>
> I want to try to send [my daughters] through college. And I want to tell them to join the Air Force.
>
> One of the best things they're doing now is to have shop for girls and Home Ec for boys. . . . Boys should know how to cook some things and sew a little and be able to take care of themselves.
>
> Boys need to know [sewing and nutrition] as much as girls. Every boy is not going to grow up to have a wife and he needs to know how to cook for himself.

Although several parents mentioned that boys might choose to remain bachelors for at least some period of time, none considered that a girl might choose to remain single. In fact, the role of wife and mother was so entrenched that some parents suggested specific courses to aid in this lifestyle.

> Girls should be trained for marriage and family life.
>
> Girls should be prepared for the role of wife and mother by taking courses in basic Psychology.
>
> I feel that any girl should have some home economics. There's too many of them that end up getting married as soon as they're out of school and they don't know how to boil water.
>
> Most girls particularly . . . eventually most of them end up getting married and having a household of children to take care of.

Those parents who did suggest specific vocational training for girls did so as a type of stop-gap measure, so girls would have something on which to fall back if the need should arise. The assumption was that girls would or should be mothers first and professional workers second. As such, only traditionally female occupations were suggested:

> Girls should be given some training so they will have a job to fall back on.
>
> Secretarial skills will prepare girls for jobs.
>
> I think it would be well for girls to be able to support themselves if the need arises.
>
> A girl when she gets out of high school should know typing fairly well and shorthand pretty good and perhaps a little bookkeeping.
>
> Girls should take clerical courses so they can get a good job when they graduate.

Other parents felt that there were specific courses in which girls should not participate. In some cases this was due to the "unfeminine" nature of

the course, in others, the parents merely felt there were no benefits to be derived from the courses.

> I don't think the girls should be allowed in power mechanics because there isn't enough space. . . . The girls are not going to make their livelihood in this way.
>
> For girls I can see absolutely no reason for them to have to take PE. . . . And of the other subjects that she takes, it's questionable about the value of Biology -- I can't really say that it's anything that's going to do her any good.

Strangely, no courses were generally considered "off limits" for boys.

Men, particularly Chicano men, were more limited in their scope of thinking about women. While some agreed that if their daughter wanted to go to college they would be willing to help, many more were fairly rigid in their stereotypical views of women's roles.

> I think it would be good if [my daughter] is able to take some typing somewhere along the way because whether she does secretarial work or whatever, she's going to need some.
>
> I never saw a girl in school in pants. Never, never saw it. . . . [Girls shouldn't] go to school in pants.
>
> I don't think college is a place for a girl. I think she should go and get married and have a family.

Occasionally, sex-role expectations were not stated as explicitly for children as for teachers. For instance, one parent stated that "women teachers should not moonlight in other jobs."

Results: Quantitative

In a more quantitative vein, parents were asked to rank each of the 12 general outcomes and 48 Mediate Goals according to priority.

There were two general outcomes with a significant difference in ranking between men and women ($p < .05$): (1) college preparation, which women ranked fifth and men ranked eighth; and (2) care of one's body, ranked sixth by men and tenth by women. Perhaps the women felt somehow less than adequate and

that a well-rounded individual, prepared for college, would be able to do as s/he wished. Men were primarily concerned with getting a job which, for many of them, meant being physically fit and able to do some type of labor.

A similar pattern is reflected in the priorities set by men and women for the 48 Mediate Goals. As shown in Table 3, there were 13 Mediate Goals for which men and women set significantly different priorities ($p < .05$). Goals related to the personal development of the student, for instance "students should develop a feeling of self-worth and self-understanding," were rated consistently higher by women than by men. Women were more concerned with the day-to-day operation of the school (perhaps because they are more often involved with their children's problems, e.g., "my wife is involved more and knows more of the courses which my daughter is taking") and stressed discipline, obedience, college preparation, and evaluation of teachers and administrators. Men were much more job-oriented; their two highest ranked Mediate Goals dealt with the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic and working with people.

In each instance, men and women tended to emphasize Goals that affect their daily lives. Perhaps these goals reflect areas in which the parents feel they are lacking, for which they have the greatest need, or, perhaps these Goals are merely a reflection of daily contact with others. Most of the men interviewed either work with or hire high school graduates; hence they stressed basic skills, working with others, vocational guidance and training, physical fitness, and equal opportunity. Women, on the other hand, stressed arithmetic; self-worth; informed citizenship; and moral, ethical, and religious values.

Table 3

Top Ten Mediate Goals for Men and Women
with a Significant Difference in Priorities

| Mediate Goal | Rank Women | Rank Men |
|---|---|---|
| Students should develop a feeling of self-worth and self-understanding. | 2 | 41* |
| Discipline standards for students should be set up and strictly enforced. | 3 | 26* |
| Students should understand the need for education, have a desire to learn, and know how to think and reason. | 4 | 35* |
| College preparation should be provided so that students may gain skills necessary for successful college work. | 5 | 43* |
| Students should acquire the knowledge which will enable them to be good, responsible, and informed citizens. | 6 | 18* |
| Students should develop good character -- a sense of moral, ethical, and religious values and goals. | 7 | 15* |
| | Men | Women |
| When they graduate, students should have the basic skills of reading, writing, spelling, and listening. | 1 | 23* |
| Students should learn to get along with and work with others. | 2 | 16* |
| Vocational guidance should be provided so that students can learn about their own abilities and interests. | 5 | 22* |
| Vocational training should be provided so that students may gain skills for employment immediately after graduation. | 6 | 19* |
| Teachers should have personal characteristics that enable them to communicate with their students and to teach them more effectively. | 7 | 23* |
| Both boys and girls should have an equal opportunity to participate in any course or activity offered by the school -- for example, home economics, industrial arts, secretarial courses, competitive athletics, clubs, and organizations. | 9 | 34* |
| Students should understand the importance of physical fitness in adult life. | 10 | 32* |

*$p < .05$

Conclusions

Research across the United States since 1942 (Parsons) has demonstrated a broadening in the range of prevailing attitudes toward traditional sex-role expectations in children and adults. Flexible attitudes now co-exist with more traditional attitudes. To a large extent, sex-related expectations of children are more or less characteristic in various parts of the country, depending also on education and social class.

In Albuquerque, our research involved the four major ethnic/racial groups, all education levels, and all income levels. As with other research projects, we found that the higher education and income levels were more flexible in their views of women's roles. However, we also found women as a group less traditional than men. One man went so far as to state:

> My home is run like a dictatorship. I'm the "Hitler." I control it. What I say goes and that's it. . . . If they don't like it, they get out.

Even allowing women to train for a job "in case" may be more than such men want.

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